
Alaska Supreme Court Statement Regarding Recent Budget Cuts

3 messages

Margaret Newman <mnewman@akcourts.us>
To: Mara Rabinowitz <mrabinowitz@akcourts.us>

Wed, Jul 3, 2019 at 9:38 AM

Chief Justice
JOEL H. BOLGER

Justices
Daniel E. Winfree
Craig Stowers
Peter J. Maassen
Susan M. Carney



303 K Street
Anchorage, Alaska 99501
(907) 264-0633 / Fax (907) 264-0632

101 Lacey Street
Fairbanks, Alaska 99701
(907) 452-9301 / Fax (907) 452-9343

Alaska Supreme Court Statement Regarding Recent Budget Cuts

On Friday, June 28, 2019, Governor Dunleavy announced vetoes of two legislatively appropriated budget items for the Alaska Court System. The first was \$1,756,300 that the legislature appropriated for small cost of living allowances for our non-union, non-judicial staff, designed to match union contract pay increases approved by the legislature for similar state employees in other government branches. The second was \$337,700 of the legislature's original \$7,217,200 appropriation for our two appellate courts. The second veto carried a statement explaining it was in response to the governor's disagreement with a recent supreme court decision.

Alaska, like the country as a whole, has a system of government with three co-equal branches. At its most basic, this means that the legislature makes the law, the governor enforces the law, and the supreme court, when faced with a constitutional challenge to a law, is required to decide it. Legislators, governors, and all other Alaskans certainly

have the right to their own opinions about the constitutionality of government action, but ultimately it is the courts that are required to decide what the constitution mandates. In a democracy based on majority rule, it is important that laws be interpreted fairly and consistently. We assure all Alaskans that the Alaska Court System will continue to render independent court decisions based on the rule of law, without regard to the politics of the day.

Finally, we reiterate to our dedicated court staff that we value your extraordinary efforts to serve Alaska's citizens each and every day. In response to Alaska's recent financial crisis and in recognition that the court system has a duty to be a good steward of the public's money, we proposed and the legislature made significant reductions to the court system's operating budget, reductions that resulted in the closure of all courts statewide on Friday afternoons and a consequent reduction of your salaries by 4% over the past three years, a cut not shared by the other two branches of government. In fairness we urge the legislature to restore the cost of living allowances that will return you to equal footing with employees of the executive and legislative branches.

James Brooks <jbrooks@adn.com>
To: Margaret Newman <mnewman@akcourts.us>
Cc: Mara Rabinowitz <mrabinowitz@akcourts.us>

Wed, Jul 3, 2019 at 9:55 AM

Margaret and Mara, is there someone in the court system who can speak about this letter? This is very unusual for the court system, and I'd like to make sure I'm understanding the implications and context.

[Quoted text hidden]

--

James Brooks

State Reporter

jbrooks@adn.com | cell: 907-419-7732

Anchorage Daily News | adn.com

300 W. 31st Ave.
Anchorage, AK 99503



Mara Rabinowitz <mrabinowitz@akcourts.us>
To: "James Brooks (jbrooks@adn.com)" <jbrooks@adn.com>

Wed, Jul 3, 2019 at 10:05 AM

Hi James, this is the court's statement and I don't have anything further to add.

[Quoted text hidden]